

# Wyoming explores oil-gas regulations

By Mead Gruver

Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. — The Wyoming governor's office is looking into possibly requiring petroleum companies that drill for oil and gas in Wyoming to test the local groundwater for any pollution before they sink a drill bit into the ground.

The goal would be to make it easier to pinpoint the source of any groundwater contamination that turned up during or after drilling. That could help any homeowners with contaminated well water to find out if oil or gas drilling in their area caused the problem or if the water pollution came from some other source.

Gov. Matt Mead looks to implement a groundwater testing requirement by the end of this year, said his natural resources adviser, Jeremiah Rieman.

"Most of the large operators do it but not all operators do it. It really can protect citizens, protect the state, protect the industry," Rieman said.

Either the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, which oversees oil and gas development in the state, or the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, the state agency that enforces pollution laws, would adopt and implement the regulation.

The governor's office is looking to new reg-

ulations in Colorado as a possible template.

The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission on Jan. 7 approved requiring companies to sample up to four water wells within half a mile of a drilling site before drilling.

Two more rounds of testing would occur between six and 12 months and five and six years after drilling. No other state requires groundwater monitoring before and after drilling.

The governor's office is wrapping up its look at what Colorado has done and other states are considering. Next, it will assess whether the commission or DEQ would be the better agency to enforce groundwater testing in Wyoming, Rieman said.

In northeast Wyoming, some people have blamed drilling for coal-bed methane for lowering their water table. Wyoming might require companies to note the volume of water

flowing in water wells near oil and gas wells.

"We might add that element in after we look at it a bit further," Rieman said.

In theory, baseline groundwater testing could have helped landowners in the Pavillion area who blame recent gas drilling for petrochemicals in their well water. A 2011 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency report found chemical traces in the groundwater that it linked to hydraulic fracturing. State regulators and Encana, which operates the Pavillion gas field, dispute the conclusion, which has not yet been formally reviewed by outside experts.

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, involves pumping pressurized water mixed with sand and chemicals underground to crack open fissures and improve the flow of oil and gas.

The Pavillion gas field is one of Encana's few Wyoming properties with domestic water wells nearby. Most of the company's

Wyoming projects are on public land with few people living nearby, Encana spokesman Doug Hock pointed out.

"In Colorado, a lot of the issue obviously revolves around drilling near people who have water wells and domestic water use," Hock said.

Even so, Encana is looking at baseline groundwater monitoring ahead of plans to drill hundreds of new gas wells in Sublette and Fremont counties, he said.

"Bottom line is, it's something we support. We think it's a best practice and I think it's in the best interest of both operators and the public," Hock said.

The key is making sure that the public can look at the results of groundwater tests and that companies don't just keep it to themselves, said Richard Garrett, a lobbyist for the Wyoming Outdoor Council.

## Solar energy: a free, reliable alternative

By John W. Henry

Rangeland Management Specialist  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Alternative energy is getting a lot of press lately with the high cost and diminishing sup-

plies of oil. Solar energy, on the other hand, is free and won't be diminishing for several billion years.

Energy from the sun is collected by green plants which turn this free energy into a food source for cattle. Cattle convert this energy into beef, a product consumable by people, thereby providing income to the rancher.

The energy chain of converting sunshine to plants to cattle to beef to dollars is a process that allows people to consume a nutritious food product from rangeland, and it is totally sustainable when properly managed.

Solar energy, the origin of all agricultural production, is free and reliable. The most important part of the sunshine-to-dollar chain is the sunshine-to-plant link, and it is something we can easily manage.

Sunshine that falls on bare ground is wasted energy whereas sunshine that falls on a green leaf creates more green leaves that collect more sunshine, to the point where several layers of leaves totally shade the ground, with little light getting through. We manage green leaves by controlling heights of the plants.

Desirable plants are those cattle like to

eat which provide the nutrition necessary to maintain healthy growth in livestock. These include grasses such as big bluestem, little bluestem, Indiangrass, switchgrass and side-oats grama.

Many forbs (weeds) are desirable as well, such as roundhead lespedeza, western ragweed and Illinois bundleflower. If undesirable plants get all the sunshine, we end up with a lot of undesirable plants such as tall dropseed, cheatgrass, dogwood and cedar trees.

The green leaves of desirable plants are tasty and readily consumed by cattle. Even better is the regrowth occurring after a plant has been grazed.

### Rotational grazing vs. intensive grazing

One way is to use a rotational grazing system by removing the cattle from a pasture or portion of a pasture to allow for regrowth and recovery.

A good start is to cross-fence a pasture and move cattle back and forth, allowing the plants on each side to rest about 28 to 40 days. Move faster in the spring when the grass is growing faster, then move slower as the growth slows down.

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